

The
TENORSAX
of
BENNETT LESTER CARTER
“BENNY”

Born: NYC. Aug. 8, 1907
 Died: LA. July 12, 2003

Introduction:

The clarinet was Benny Carter's third instrument after altosax and trumpet (also playing tenorsax and piano). My enthusiasm for Benny Carter was shared by my friends trumpeter Per Borthen and Danish Ib Skovsted Thomsen, and we published the Benny Carter Solography together as Vol. 8 (1982) in my Jazz Solography Series. It had altosax, trumpet, tenorsax and clarinet integrated, but I have chosen to separate the instruments in this new version almost thirty years later (I am not quite sure this was a good idea, and it also involved a lot of extra work, but it is too late to change now!).

Early history:

His cousin, Theodore 'Cuban' Bennett (1902-65), was a distinguished trumpet player, Darnell Howard was also Benny's cousin. Benny's father was a self-taught guitarist, his mother played organ and piano. Began on piano at an early age, did odd jobs as a milkman's assistant, laundry deliverer, and upholsterer in order to save up for an instrument. Inspired by Bubber Miley, a local San Juan resident, he bought a secondhand trumpet, after several hours abortive blowing he returned to the shop and swapped it for a 'C melody' sax. 'Subbed' for Ben Whitted at John O'Connors' Club, then in August 1924 joined June Clark's band and switched to alto sax. Soon afterwards he joined Billy Paige's Broadway Syncopators at the Capitol, New York, went to Pittsburgh with them in October 1924. They soon disbanded and Benny (with 'Cuban' Bennett) worked with Lois Deppe's Serenaders, then on baritone with Earl Hines at the Grape Arbor in Pittsburgh (late 1924). In May 1925 he went to Wilberforce College, Ohio, intending to study theology, but joined Horace Henderson's Collegians instead. Left Horace Henderson in 1926, during that summer worked with Billy Fowler's band in Baltimore and New York. Briefly with James P. Johnson, also spent two weeks in Duke Ellington's band (deputising for Harvey Boone). Short spell with Fletcher Henderson, then spent over a year with Charlie Johnson. Rejoined Horace Henderson in Detroit, briefly with Fletcher Henderson (autumn 1928), then formed own band for Arcadia Balkoom, New York. Led own band on tour, then again with Fletcher Henderson from January 1930. Joined Chick Webb c. March 1931, left during the summer of 1931 to become musical director of McKinney's Cotton Pickers. From this period onwards regularly doubled on trumpet. Worked with McKinney's for almost a year, during this period also played dates with Don Redman and Fletcher Henderson. Led own band again from c. September 1932 (briefly fronted by Fletcher Henderson in Pennsylvania, December 1932). Mainly active leading own band 1933-34, some touring, also residencies at Lafayette Theatre, Savoy Ballroom, New York, etc. Rejoined Fletcher Henderson briefly in September 1934. BC had been arranging regularly since the time he joined Charlie Johnson's band, he arranged for Duke Ellington, Teddy Hill, McKinney's, Mills Blue Rhythm Band, Fletcher Henderson, etc., in 1934 he began arranging for Benny Goodman. Worked on trumpet with Willie Bryant in spring 1935, subsequently worked occasionally for Charlie Barnet before settling in Europe. After emigration delays, BC joined Willie Lewis's band in Paris in the summer of 1935. On the 18th March 1936 he took up appointment as staff arranger for Henry Hall and his Orchestra in London, after touring Scandinavia (autumn 1936) he returned to London. Moved on to the Continent, played with Freddy Johnson in Amsterdam from March 1937, also appeared in France before leading International Band at Scheveningen, Holland, during summer 1937. Led band at Boeuf sur le Toit in Paris before returning to U.S.A. in May 1938. After a long vacation, he organised own big band which made its official debut at the Savoy Ballroom, New York. Led own big band 1940 to summer 1941, then cut down to a sextet in autumn 1941. Moved to West Coast early in 1943, led own band at Billy Berg's Club, Los Angeles, followed by residencies at The Hollywood, Casa Manana, etc. Started 1944 with a residency at the Apollo in New York, continued to lead own band through 1944. In 1945 made the permanent move to Los Angeles, residencies at The Trocadero, Hollywood, Plantation Club, etc. Reorganised new seven-piece band in summer of 1947, residency at Billy Berg's Club from July. (ref. John Chilton).

BENNY CARTER TENORSAX SOLOGRAPHY

This famous altosaxophone, trumpet and clarinet player and one of the world's most marvellous arrangers did some fooling around on the tenor saxophone in Europe 1936-37. The preserved results are listed below:

BENNY CARTER AND HIS ORCHESTRA **London, April 15, 1936**

Max Goldberg, Tommy McQuater, Duncan Whyte (tp), Ted Heath, Bill Mulraney (tb), Benny Carter (tp, cl, as, ts, p-105?, vo-105), Andy McDevitt (cl, as), E. O. Pogson (as), Buddy Featherstonhaugh (ts), Pat Dodd (p), Georgie Elliott (g), Al Burke (b), Ronnie Gubertini (dm).

Four titles were recorded for English Vocalion, one has BC (ts):

- | | | |
|---------|-----------|---|
| S-104-1 | Nightfall | Tenorsax solo 32 bars,
last 8 in ensemble. (S) |
| S-104-2 | Nightfall | As above. (S) |

Quoted from my previous Benny Carter Solography: "You just cannot believe this! If there was no reason for a solography before, there is now!! From now on all the talents of Benny Carter blossom freely. He switches from instrument to instrument with great ease ... everything is perfection ... his tenorsax on "Nightfall" ... it sounds just like an alto pitched lower, there is no fundamental difference in style. Not many contemporaries treated the tenorsax in such an elegant way".

BENNY CARTER AND HIS ORCHESTRA **London, mid-June, 1936**

Max Goldberg, Tommy McQuater (tp), Leslie Thompson (tp, tb), Lew Davis, Ted Heath (tb), Freddy Gardner, Andy McDevitt (cl, as), Benny Carter (tp, cl, as, ts, p-117?, ldr), Buddy Featherstonhaugh (ts), Billy Munn (p), Albert Harris (g), Wally Morris (b), George Elrick (dm), Elisabeth Welch (vo-120).

Six titles were recorded, three have BC (ts):

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|---------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| S-115-1 | Scandal In A Flat | Tenorsax solo 8 bars. (S) |
| S-115-2 | Scandal in A Flat | As above. (S) |
| S-119-1 | If Only I Could Read Your Mind | Tenorsax solo 32 bars. (M) |
| S-119-2 | If Only I Could Read Your Mind | As above. (M) |
| S-120-2 | I Gotta Go | Tenorsax solo 19 bars. (SM) |

Quote again: "The tenorsax is surprisingly the most prominent instrument, and the two beautiful takes of "If Only ..." must be noted. Also the slow "... A Flat" and take 2 of "I Gotta Go" feature tenorsax of unheard quality".

BENNY CARTER AND HIS SWING QUARTET **London, June 20, 1936**

Benny Carter (tp, as, ts), Gene Rodgers (p), Bernard Addison (g), Wally Morris (b), George Elrick (dm), Elisabeth Welch (vo-121).

Three titles were recorded, two have BC (ts):

- | | | |
|---------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| S-122-1 | Waltzing The Blues | Tenorsax solo 12 bars. (SM) |
| S-122-2 | Waltzing The Blues | As above. (SM) |
| S-123-1 | Tiger Rag | Tenorsax solo 96 bars. (F) |

Good, but not remarkable tenorsax on these items.

BENNY CARTER AND THE RAMBLERS **Laren, March 24, 1937**

Benny Carter (tp, cl, as, ts), George van Helvoirt, Jack Bulterman (tp), Marcel Thielemans (tb), Wim Poppink, Andre van der Ooderaa (cl, as), Sal Doof (ts), Freddy Johnson (p), Frits Reinders (g), Jac Pet (b), Kees Kranenburg Sr. (dm), Theo Uden Masman (dir).

Four titles were recorded for Dutch Decca, one has BC (ts):

- | | | |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| AM-371-1 | I'll Never Give In T | Tenorsax solo with orch 10 bars. (SM) |
| AM-371-2 | I'll Never Give In | As above. (SM) |

Quite memorable tenorsax on these items!

